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THE PROTECTION OF FACTORY WORKERS¹

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THE interpretation of the term "protection of factory workers" has undergone great changes since first the need of such protection became evident. It is interesting to trace the various stages in the evolution of this idea from its birth until the present time.

The first theoretical impulse was given by the epoch-making treatise of Rammazzini *On the Diseases of the Artizans*, published at the end of the seventeenth century and translated into English in 1705. In this book we first find a description of various diseases of occupations and a statement of the need for the protection of the worker from these diseases. Forty years later appeared the work of Dr. Pringle *On the Diseases of the Army*, followed in 1753 by Dr. Lind's *On the Means of Preserving the Health of the Seamen* and by Dr. Blane's *Observations on the Diseases of the Seamen*, published in 1785.

Almost simultaneously with the birth of the modern factory system in the latter part of the eighteenth century came philanthropic efforts to protect workers from the abuses of this system. The agitations of Hanway, Dr. Percival, Dr. Ferriar, and a host of others,—the forefathers of the present child-labor committees, so to speak, bore fruit in the enactment in 1802 of the first factory act protecting the health of children working in cotton factories. The history of the progress of labor legislation and of enactments for the protection of factory workers since 1802 is replete with interest, but cannot be discussed here. Beginning with the protection of pauper child-apprentices in cotton factories, protection has gradually been extended until it now comprehends various conditions of the life and labor of the whole working class.

¹ Read at the meeting of the Academy of Political Science, April 18, 1912.

It is interesting to analyze the protection of factory workers as it is found at present in civilized countries. The measures fall broadly into five classes which may be sub-divided as follows:

1. *The Worker*

(a) Age.

Limitation, restriction and prohibition of child work.

(b) Sex.

Limitation, restriction and prohibition of woman's work.

(c) Industrial education.

(d) Vocational guidance.

2. *Working Conditions*

(a) Wages.

(b) Hours of labor.

(c) Conditions of labor.

3. *The Workshop*

(a) Construction.

(b) Fire protection.

(c) Light and illumination.

(d) Ventilation.

(e) Sanitary care.

(f) Sanitary comforts.

4. *Dangers of Occupation*

(a) Safeguarding of machinery.

(b) Dusty trades.

(c) Industrial poisons, gases and fumes.

(d) Infectious materials and extra-hazardous labor.

5. *Social Protection*

(a) Right of labor organization.

(b) Housing of the working classes.

(c) Prevention of accident; accident insurance.

(d) Prevention of unemployment; unemployment insurance.

(e) Prevention of sickness; sickness insurance.

(f) Prevention of excessive industrial mortality; industrial mortality insurance.

The agencies for the protection of factory workers are many and various. These agencies rarely take in the whole range of the work, but limit themselves to one or more of the divisions of labor protection enumerated above. These several agencies can be classified as follows:

- (1) Philanthropic organizations.
- (2) Employers.
- (3) Labor organizations.
- (4) The state.
- (5) The industry.

(1) The number of *philanthropic organizations* started from time to time with the purpose of agitating for the protection of factory workers is large. As already mentioned, the rise of the humanitarian spirit dates far back to the end of the seventeenth century. As a rule the specific phases of protection which philanthropic bodies take up are child labor and woman's work.

(2) As far as the protection of workers by *employers* themselves is concerned, since the time of Robert Owen there have been a large number of enlightened and liberal employers who have endeavored to introduce better conditions into their industrial establishments and to ameliorate the condition of the workers in their employ. In most cases this protection has been in the form of improved sanitary conditions of factories, and in certain limitations of hours of labor.

(3) The protection of factory workers by *labor organizations* has been mostly in the increase of wages and in the lessening of the hours of labor.

(4) The protection which factory workers receive from the *state* is usually a result, on the one hand, of the agitation of philanthropic bodies, and on the other hand, of the increasing demands of labor organizations, which are often endorsed by enlightened employers.

The forms of protection by the *state* are many and embody practically all the measures enumerated above. Much pressure must be brought upon legislative bodies and much agitation must be carried on before the state exerts its powers. The protection of factory workers depends naturally upon the definiteness and lucidity of the laws, and upon the creation of proper and intelligent organizations for enforcing them.

(5) The protection of the workers by the *industry* seems to be an ideal method, but is practical only when the components of the industry—the employers, the employes and the consuming public—are educated to a point where their interests may be mutually combined and protected by one another. This is really an intelligent coöperation of the three principal partners in an industry, and would afford the best protection for the employes and the industry, especially if such protection were conducted with the coöperation of the state.

I wish in no wise to belittle the efforts and the work of any institutions or organizations for the protection of factory workers, but it seems to me that the time has arrived when such protection is largely to be entrusted to the industry itself, working coöperatively with the other legitimate protective agencies.

My suggestions, therefore, to this end are:

To form a closer coöperation between the various agencies for the protection of workers, including a centralization and unification of philanthropic bodies and their coöperation with labor organizations and industrial societies.

To compel industrial employers to be responsible, in coöperation with the state, for the protection of their workers.

Such a general concentration of forces on the improvement of industrial conditions would inevitably result in a more progressive system of protection for workers than we now have.